



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF STATE ARTS AGENCIES
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Arts Advocacy Dialogue Session

October 18, 2013

Facilitator: David Miller, Arts Strategy Consultant
See the [facilitator's bio](#) under Friday Afternoon Dialogues.

Facilitator David Miller outlined three possible areas of exploration for the arts advocacy dialogue:

Tactics: This includes technology, coalitions, and work that builds a solid base of trust and support, lessening the distance that may need to be closed in the event of a crisis. Coalitions have varying strengths and dynamics based on the nature of the advocacy (more specific versus more general).

Champions: It used to be that governors and legislators were state arts agencies' primary champions. More recently, champions are coming from new places, such as business and the community.

Challenges: It can be difficult to decide who should formulate advocacy agendas and coordinate their execution. The solution is often reconciliation of personalities and determining how best people can work with each other.

Miller opened the dialogue to participants, who shared their experiences.

Tactics

Social media: South Carolina had good success with a Facebook campaign when arts agency funding was vetoed by the governor in 2010. The agency has a tight relationship with the state arts advocacy organization, and had dipped its toe in the social media water; these activities ramped up in the days following the veto to amass hundreds of followers. When the agency was again vetoed last year, similar buzz seized legislators' attention. Miller noted social media's short time frames and the tendency of some individuals to respond rashly on-line.

E-mail: When Wyoming legislators challenged a bill to insert fine and performing arts into scholarship requirements for college-bound students, the arts council used e-mail to inform them about the facts. Nevada legislator e-mail accounts will not accept more than a certain number of messages with the same subject line (mass emails, such as those generated by arts advocacy groups), which has spawned

alternative outreach efforts. The Nevada Arts Council reached many throughout the state via social media, videos, phone calls, letter writing, and in-person meetings to promote activities and hearings.

Miller noted that technology may be giving legislators "no place to hide" because of immediate consequences, and warned that these channels could shrink the circle of conversation and diminish trust.

Meeting with legislators: The West Virginia Commission on the Arts tasks its commissioners with meeting with their federal legislators when they are at home. Miller noted that some legislators have been impressed to receive calls on their personal phone lines—which is more private than using social media.

Changing grantee behavior: Grantees must report annually to the Montana Arts Council on their advocacy activities. This changes the way they talk about their work: rather than "bragging," they thank legislators by showing them what state dollars buy—and legislators care about changing something for the better.

Coalitions: The Nebraska Cultural Endowment includes the arts council and the humanities council, which did not initially have good rapport. They had to rethink their relationship in order to obtain funding as the endowment, and have developed good relationships with members of the state legislature as they work together to advocate. Years ago, the South Carolina Arts Commission began associating with the state education department and finding arts connections; the agency offered its arts alliance some endowment funds for arts education advocacy. Texas reported that the business association and municipal league were helpful in the latest legislative session. After several cultural agencies came under attack by a state budget officer in Maine, the state's historical, archive, museum, humanities and arts agencies joined together, meeting regularly and helping to get bond issues passed.

Champions and Challenges

To get the conversation started, Miller posed several questions about arts champions:

- Is the nature of champions changing?
- Can championship without grass-roots support ever succeed?
- Is championship always on the state level?
- Is championship ever from outside the arts?

Legislative champions: States shared experiences in working with arts champions in their legislatures. A champion in the Nevada senate worked with the Nevada Arts Council executive director to insert visual art in the legislative building. The local museum and other senators were involved in the program, which was promoted on local television. Half of the attendees at a closing reception were senators (including the incoming chair of the National Conference of State Legislatures).

No champion is an island: Legislators of the six states that recently had the largest cuts to their state arts agency funding were asked recently what factors may have resulted in larger cuts. All of these states had strong champions—but in one case, a champion did not want to work with a coalition. An individual champion may lose power if they work without a caucus.

Competing constituencies: Tension between arts council and historic preservation funding in one New England state spurred launch of a sequential granting program by the arts council that is followed up with humanities funding.

Making the arts' political clout more apparent: One state arts agency suggested that arts advocates who make large campaign contributions tell legislators that the funding is in the name of the arts. Another obtains a list of all donors to state legislators and shares it with its board for follow-up and relationship building.

Allies in sports: In Washington, D.C., connections with national sports teams have proved fruitful. In Ohio, the state arts agency was courted by a national team to place an ad. The sports franchises respect the reach and responsive constituency of the arts agencies, and citizens listen when these voices advocate for the arts.

Advocacy groups: Relationships with statewide arts advocacy groups are varied. Some state arts agencies are challenged to synchronize work with their advocacy group. Tennessee's arts advocacy group started an "adopt a legislator" program, in which arts organizations develop a relationship with a legislator for one year, meeting regularly about what is happening in their district. Because there are state arts agency grants in every legislative district in Nebraska, the arts agency and advocacy group work closely to reach out to all legislators. In addition, the arts council and humanities council each have the right to choose board members for the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts ensured that the chair of the arts council is an ex officio member of the arts advocacy group, helping to choose its leadership. The South Carolina Arts Commission is the primary source of funding for its advocacy group.

Miller noted that champions are coming from outside government and the arts, and that municipal-level champions are as important as those in the state legislature.